

A Week of Vesak Thinking 1999

(May 1999)

Bhikkhu Professor Dhammavihari

A Thought for the Day - 1

By the benevolence of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, may all beings be well and happy. It is at a time like this, during the month of Vesak in May, that the world, through the appearance of the Buddha, had the gift of a message which revolutionized its thinking. It was a message from one born in this world as a human, not a divine emissary, who by his sheer diligent striving rose from his mundane limitations to transcendental heights. This revised thinking gave a new sense of direction to the life style of humans in the world. Time wise, it was more than twenty-five centuries ago and place wise it was in a limited region in the Gangetic plain in India. It was the message of Gotama the Buddha, the Lord of Peace, whom the entire thinking world today adores as Shakyamuni, the symbol of human perfection.

Within the first five hundred years, owing to the goodwill missions of Emperor Asoka, this message spread westwards in Asia beyond Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq. Incontestable evidence, both literary and archaeological, testify to the fact that these countries had all become Buddhist before the commencement of the Christian era. The giant Buddha statues of Bamiyan in Afghanistan reconfirmed this evidence not long ago when they came to be threatened with destruction by rebelling political groups there, in their battles against each other. In the east, Buddhism gained acceptance in China, Korea and Japan, about the same time, reaching China in 50 A.D., during the reign of Emperor Ming Ti.

The Buddha broke through traditional Indian thinking when he dauntlessly declared that peace on earth and goodwill among men are both man made. It is we who guide our lives, to fortune or to misfortune. Man has no divine protection

to seek, outside himself. *Attāno loko* - the Buddha clearly declared. Man has to seek it within himself. Why have we to endlessly debate on this subject these days? Are we caught up in a futile, eternal tangle? Turn to the Raṭṭhapāla Sutta of the Majjhima Nikaya at [MN. II. 54 ff.] and there you have it, as we have quoted here .

"O man, correct thine own self first. Then turn to guide others. A wise man shall not let himself get tarnished." This is the sound advice of the Dhammapada verse 158.

Learn this in its beautiful Pali version and have it written in gold on your bed-head.

Attānam eva paṭhamam patirūpe nivesaye

Atha ' ññamanusāseyya na kilisseyya paṇḍito.

Dhp. v. 158

This is where the Buddhist concept of self assessment, self-detection and self-correction has to come to the fore. And I say, remain there all the time. This is the basis of *sīla*, this is the foundation of the good life in Buddhism which leads to Nibbana. In the homes, in the schools and in work places, people cannot be excused on any account, for breaking these basic five precepts of the *pañca-sīla*. Where else in Sri Lanka can Buddhism exist? Certainly not in midair.

In the more civilized countries of the world, persons who throw litter in the streets, or smoke in forbidden places or display sexual vulgarity in public places are liable to be prosecuted and punished, without any doubt whatsoever. In Sri Lanka, let us say, the five precepts are the basics of civilized and decent behaviour, in public or in private. What do we do with their breach? Just grin and say ' They are difficult things to observe'. This is why we reckon that we in Sri Lanka today are in the midst of lawlessness and anarchy, by whatever world standards we reckon. There is none to prosecute and lamentably, much less persons or authority to punish. Law enforcement has totally decayed and fallen

apart on the ground.

Buddhist teachings unmistakably adopted this attitude very early. They accepted *sīla* as the basic ingredient for social harmony as well as for peace and security in the land. In their breach, social insecurity is envisaged under the concept of *bhaya* or *pañca-bhayāni*. This lamentable state in society is finally traced to the breach of the precepts of the *pañca-sīla*. It is interesting and vitally important to note how far they go ahead of the Fundamental Human Rights which have come on the scene only twenty-five centuries later.

The two major items of 1. Respect for one's life and 2. Respect for one's property of the Fundamental Human Rights are already contained under our first two precepts. Respect for genders, particularly the respectful attitude towards the woman in society, is provided for under the third precept, which safeguards marriage at all levels as pre-marital, marital and extra-marital. Of this, the world is not yet convinced or even sensitive enough. Evils of dishonesty are far too many to list here. Finally the endeavour in Buddhism to safeguard sanity and mental soundness of men and women through rejection of drugs and alcohol anticipates the drug menace well ahead of time. We Sri Lankans should also become aware, even at this rather late stage, that even their sale is banned in Buddhism under the five-fold forbidden trades.

In an essentially Buddhist country like Sri Lanka, it is more than urgent that the rulers and the ruled awaken to the calamitous and disastrous situation which we are facing today on account of the breach of these five precepts of decency. It is time for us to make a collective all out endeavour for a total purge. We wish everybody victory in this battle.

May all beings be well and happy. May there be peace on earth and goodwill among men.



A Thought for the Day - 2

By the benevolence of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, may all beings be well and happy. Having briefly indicated the need for the observance of the principles of the *pañca-sīla* for the well being of society, including all life therein, let us pick one each day for further elaboration.

Is important for the Buddhists to note that the precept pertaining to respect for all life - *pāṇātipātā veramaṇī* - heads the list. **That is where all our morality or basis of good living begins.** In Buddhism this includes all life, i.e. of man and bird and beast. It is agreed in principle that life is dear to all: *Sabbesaṃ jīvitam piyam.* says the Dhammapada verse no. 130. Statement after statement pours in supporting this position. Every being that has come into existence loves to continue being so and never likes to have its life process terminated, by anyone for any reason: *jīvitukāmā* and *amaritukāmā*. Everybody's right to life is essentially the Buddhist principle, shared with the Jains of old, and they both enforced this as the very first one of their code of good living.

Our needs by way of food, clothing and shelter as we live in this world do not justify the destruction either by ourselves personally, or with the intermediary of others, of the lives of any other sentient being. In the world of trade and commerce today, many do the killing for others. Money and profit wise, it looks extremely attractive. Therefore many are driven to it professionally, unmindful of any other considerations. **Killing for the market, for food and clothing, is a worldwide capitalist venture of the highest grade.** Would the socialists or the democrats of the world, the great champions of peace and prosperity, raise a finger against it. Their ready-made reply would be that the victims are not humans. The exploitation is of the silent dumb community who cannot lay their

claims before the world. We know how a few courageous people in the world like Professor Peter Singer of Australia, in his Animal Liberation and Jeremy Rifkin in his Beyond Beef take up this cause.

Money rules the roost today. Ethics and moral considerations lie far outside the money market and therefore play much less than even the second fiddle. Even political ideologies are subordinated to this larger money attraction. Everybody tries to capture world markets in the so-called less developed countries for their goods. And everybody tries to manufacture something, wholesome or unwholesome, so that they can get the money for their survival.

This is where Buddhism steps in to stipulate as to what are possible forms of trade in a country. They ban the manufacture and sale of weapons of destruction and firearms. Forbidden sales include poison as well. This shows the overall concern for the safety and security of life all round. **This total respect for life should be the primary consideration where one comes forward to speak of peace moves in the world.** What good does it do for big men to initiate peace moves on world platforms and subversively indulge in illicit sale of fire arms wherever one can trap helpless poor countries, having cleverly manipulated warring situations within them. This definitely is the order of the day and we know it very well, thanks to the world media.

This becomes extremely easy where the pride of killing the enemy for national or religious glory has been popularized as a noble theme, quite often in our misguided society. These promptings for destruction of life, we witness in the world today, more than ever before, in all three areas of 1. ethnic supremacy, 2. religious arrogance and 3. political domination. On paper alone, we speak of fundamental human rights, at national and international levels, but elsewhere endeavour to wipe out everything that is different to our ways of thinking and acting. See in our midst samples of these for yourself.

It is not a day too early in Sri Lanka to get sensitized to these menacing new

trends, showing themselves up everywhere. Are we, the young and the old, the religious and the less religious, serious about arresting this decay? Do we think it is only the other man's business and leave it alone for him to handle it? Definitely we are erring in a very serious and disastrous way!

We address these words to everyone. Not only to the Buddhists. We are humans. Let us be essentially human. We have it on record "He prayeth best that loveth best All things both great and small". Others know equally well to chant melodiously the wish or prayer ***Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā***. In Sri Lanka, we have enough inspiration on all sides to put this concept of love seriously into practice.

As an expression of this, why not turn vegetarian for at least one day in the week? This is Love, much more than in the frivolous Valentine way! This is primarily an act of self-discipline, of testing our own strength within, as man or woman. There are enough things to eat, and lovely and wholesome good things, at that. Explore the possibility. Love selflessly, and you will be loved in turn unasked, a great deal more.

**Let us turn the Third Millennium as it comes to one of Save All Life in the world.
May all beings be well and happy. May there be peace on earth and goodwill
among men.**



A Thought for the Day - 3

By the benevolence of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, may all beings be well and happy. Today we pick up the second of the ***pañca-sīla*** precepts, namely ***adinnādānā-veramaṇī***, for a closer study. Formulated well over twenty-five centuries ago, it more than anticipates the second of the Fundamental Human Rights. Both endeavour to safeguard a person's right to his

legitimately earned possessions. The precept *adinnādānā-veramaṇī* precisely insists on the legitimacy of the ownership of such possessions. A Commentarial note on it says that 'In the acquisition of private propriety there shall be no violation of state law'. This is specified as *adaṇḍāraho*. Such acquisition shall also not be questionable under good and wise public opinion. They call this *ananuvajjo*.

In committing an act of theft, one is described in Buddhism as dispossessing another of his legitimately acquired property, whether it is a bunch of bananas in the garden or a television set inside the house. What is interesting is that in Buddhism, such possessions are viewed **as the source of one's pleasure in one's life** or *tuṭṭhi-jananakaṃ*. Legally, it is the legitimacy of acquisition which entitles a person to own and possess. Even in the absence of a law-enforcement authority, or its becoming defunct as we witness all around today, a high level of morality in the land would frown upon theft. Buddhism expects this from society.

So it was in Sri Lanka in and around the year 1200. A young girl could walk from one part of this little island to another further away, all by herself, and a with a precious jewel in her hand, without any harassment, sexual or otherwise. There was no moral anarchy in the country and no beasts in human form or humans in beastly form, freely roamed the land then as it is today. What is it then today? Is anybody accountable for anything that happens, anywhere? In the home, in the school, in office, or in the street? Where is prosecution, where is punishment?

These are things to which we as a country or nation, need to awaken, rudely or otherwise, as a new millennium is seen round the corner. On the contrary, monuments large and small, in metal and in stone, i.e. statues to the memory of people, keep competitively shooting up in street corners day after day. People clearly know what each one of them stands for, even in their silence. Statues of gun-wielding soldiers, stand much higher than the rest, almost at every roundabout in the land, ironically blowing out the message of peace or perhaps our military might.

At this time of the century, with just only seven more months to wind up, and as the new millennium keeps amorously winking at us, let us muster all our resources at hand to restore law and order here. In the name of all religions whose messages we deliver without fail at the break of dawn every day, let us identify the villain of crime in this country, crimes of sex, and drugs and anything else perverse, and band ourselves to fight him. Let us not forget that in the survival of crime, all of us men, women and children will all perish. If what is morality has any meaning in any body's head, nothing shall prevent people of all religions, of diverse ethnic communities and of all heterogeneous political groupings, to gather themselves together for this single worthy purpose. We are with you.

Let it be known that sensible people in many countries abroad band themselves together to watch the interests of the neighborhood in which they live. They mark out a segment of their area of residence and declare it a **Neighborhood Watch Area**. Signboards on road sides show groups of people of diverse identities - of blacks and whites, of men, women and children of all age groups and even of uniformed officers - uniting for this purpose.

They collectively guard the area, keeping an eye on the movable and immovable property of the residents, dispersing trouble makers who hang around, and informing the police by telephone of suspicious characters in the neighbourhood and their questionable behaviour.

To do this successfully we need to restore into our country **the feeling of neighbourly love and friendliness**. The idea of the multi-ethnic, multi-religious community must be retrieved and re-established. Learn from Bosnia and Albania and other devastated countries of the world where such hostilities have existed on a very much larger scale and stretches over a much longer period. Statistics from these areas which we download from the internet from time to time are staggering and well and truly revealing with regard to motivations behind these murderous ventures.

We do seriously hope that in this lovely season of Vesak when we think of the Buddha as the Lord of Peace whose message of universal friendliness or *maitrī* shall bring to mankind lasting peace and security, we shall in this island country endeavour to do a great deal more to weld together a nation of peace loving Sri Lankans, inspite of our differences of ethnic and religious diffrenecs.

May all beings be well and happy. May there be peace on earth and goodwill among men.



A Thought for the Day - 4

By the benevolence of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, may all beings be well and happy. We talk today about the third precept *kāmesu-micchācārā* of the *pañca-sīla*. This pertains to the sex life of the human community. Whatever the Pundits in Sri Lanka, monk or layman say, there is no mistaking that this refers to sex life, inspite of the word *kāma* here used in the plural which puts them all off. It definitely does not refer to sensual pleasures in general. This is far too big a blunder, committed by VERY BIG PEOPLE, to be taken up here. Verse no. 246 of the Dhammapada correctly identifies the breach of this precept primarily as adulterous behaviour or *paradārañ ca gacchati*. Commentaries always explain this as related to sex life or *methuna-samācāra*, i.e. pre-marital or extra-marital.

Buddhism's concern with this is because, to say the least, decent and healthy continuance and growth of human life in the world is grounded on sex, i.e. honourable combination of the sexes, as man and woman, complimentary to each other. Sai the production of children, can men take it over from the women, even if they choose to? It would also be correct to say that in Buddhist thinking love, marriage and sex are closely associated and integrated. Let this be known

and taught in this country adequately.

To begin with, this is the social or societal aspect of propriety in sex behaviour. Even in proper behaviour, restraints and reservations are envisaged. In terms of Buddhist thinking, this relates to chastity or chaste behaviour. Monastic life in serious pursuit of the goal of Nibbana, on the other hand, essentially requires complete celibacy.

In the code of the *pañca-sīla* which is prescribed for the regular day to day observance of the lay community, this precept, on the one hand, leaves no room for premarital sex, and extra-marital on the other. This virtue of chastity or restraint from premarital sex is referred to as *komāra-brahmacariya*. In marriage, no extra-marital relations are permitted, not even with the consent or connivance of erring parties or partners, however enticing it may be. This situation is referred to as *sahasā sampiyena vā* and its breach is condemned as being vulgar or *vasala* in the Vasala Sutta [Suttanipāta pp. 21-25].

The restriction on premarital sex in Buddhism is not that difficult to understand. The situation does not appear to be any different from what it realistically is in the world today, twenty-five centuries later. Unmarried mothers and unwanted children on the one hand, bringing along with them the appended crime of everybody involved slipping out of the situation, with the abortion of the unwanted and unexpected child. This is viewed in Buddhism as repugnantly equal to murder, as quite many saner men and women from the ranks of doctors and philosophers in many parts of the world hold today. The errant behaviour of slip-out males create the situation of fatherless homes which even America does not view with approval, as Bill Clinton himself made known, after one year of his election as President the first time.

Alongside this disapproval of what is considered erratic and irresponsible social behaviour, there came up in the U.S.A. in 1996 a massive joint protest against premarital sex from teenage girls of all nationalities. At that time, there

were as many as ten thousand of them. This is what they said. **We are teenagers. We do not want sex.** They pledged to wear in public badges with the words **Sex is worth waiting for.** This is what education in the real sense can do in any country, in addition to training the young for jobs. Perhaps we might need the services of two ministries for this in our country. We need a special one for value inculcation, with specially trained Ministers as well as personnel to handle it.

While admitting the vital role of education in every area of social correction, let us honestly ask ourselves **When and where does education begin?** World authorities on the subject are known to say that it does begin at zero. That is in the home, on one's mother's lap. We would even be more correct if we said that it is while one is still in the mother's womb. But that sacredness of the mother's womb as a place where glory of life has its first beginnings, is now virtually in the garbage bin.

We feel that in Sri Lanka, if sex relations are to acquire a healthy and wholesome pattern, education must play a more serious and sensible role. Not merely provide safeguards for promiscuous sex behaviour. This education must necessarily begin in the home, with parents playing a more exemplary and accountable role. Defaulting parents cannot play the role of guides. Caught up in the trendy run of things, and infected with crazy ideas of social elitism, parents are known to aid and abet the young in these areas of questionable sex behaviour.

It is not a day too early in Sri Lanka for parents of all ethnic groups and religious denominations to join hands and come forward for a retrieval of lost values in this country. If humanity survives, then seeds of religion and culture will definitely sprout on such rich soil once again.

May all beings be well and happy. May there be peace on earth and goodwill among men.



A Thought for the Day - 5

By the benevolence of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, may all beings be well and happy. Honesty in speech, people generally say, is the most difficult to maintain. Yes. Let us concede that it may appear to be so. **Musāvādā** or lying is dangerously slippery and evasive and takes much less time to execute than any other physical crime like killing or theft.

The danger of proneness to it is highlighted in Buddhism, stating that he who resorts to lying with ease is capable of committing any crime. No crime is too difficult for him - **natthi pāpam akāriyaṃ**. Verse no. 176 of the Dhammapada would constantly remind you of this.

*Ekam dhammam atītaṃ musāvādissa jantuno
Vitiṇṇaparalokassa natthi pāpam akāriyaṃ.*

Dph. v. 176

Dishonesty in speech leads to a total breakdown of all social contracts. Human society has to go on a basis of trust and understanding. Promises have to be kept. Wheels of society move on this basis. We are wheels within wheels. If one fails, the entire set up can come to a grinding halt.

Let us take a few statements from the dhamma and examine them ourselves. He who abstains from lying speaks only what is true. He is **sacca-vādī**. In what he says there is factual consistency. Therefore he is **bhūta-vādī**. He does not gamble between **what is** and **what is not**. Thereby he does not cheat or deceive another, by presenting a picture which really exists not. This is a virtue that is insisted on in the Metta Sutta too. This is what is meant by the statement **na paro param nikubbetha**. An honest man has also to keep to his promises: **sacca-sandho**. He is also reliable: **theto paccayiko**.

Talking of the need to lie or be dishonest, it is summed up as 1. for one's benefit, 2. for the benefit of another or 3. for the sake of some gain, material or otherwise. When we are driven to situations like these, why do we not stop for a moment and become aware of the fact that in society we live in the midst of numerous reciprocal relationships, to persons as well as to institutions? We cannot afford to act hastily and rudely as we choose. We would then be knocking many people on many sides. We violently disrupt social order. Harmony and goodwill depend on this. We know this quite often. But we are unmindful of the consequences. Or in the rude and clumsy anti-social way, we are used to thinking, and saying **We could not care less.**

At verbal level or in being dishonest in what we say, the absence of immediate recording of what is said, enables the miscreant to change his position with another statement, contradicting the former. This leads to constructive malicious lying. Checking for the truth in this case becomes difficult and disentanglement still more difficult. Defrauding in action is the compliment to this. Deliberate falsification includes both negation of the real and the factual as well as the elimination of one thing and the substitution of yet another for it. Even collective tampering with medical reports, for the sake of personal gain, is not unheard of in Sri Lanka these days.

Dishonesty leading from lying to factual distortion, or vice versa, is viewed in legal contexts as serious criminal offences. We know of ministers of state in other countries, now serving three or four years in prison, being convicted of falsifying personal financial statements which in some way are connected with the state. The state today needs to take a more serious view of honesty. Whether they be wild allegations leading to character assassination of men and women, in high or low positions, or rich or poor, whether it be swindling of state funds, in big or small amounts, the state as well as the public must learn to view them with far greater seriousness and to bring to book the miscreants for due punishments.

Our request to our Sri Lankans, quite apart from their religious and ethnic

differences, is to hold fast with national dignity to their inborn respect for honesty in word and deed and strive for the uplift of the society in which we live here. In spite of a temporary gloss of success it can provide for the time being, it invariably nurtures an inner cancer which would finally be calamitous. Each one of us in this country, must invoke our Dharma or God above, to enable us to be honest to ourselves and to practice honesty with all around us, so that we may salvage the country and its people from slipping into the bottomless abyss towards which it appears to be heading disastrously everyday.

To thine own self be true, O man. You know very well the truth from falsehood. *Attā te purisa jānāti saccaṃ vā yadi vā musā.*

May all beings be well and happy. May there be peace on earth and goodwill among men.



A Thought for the Day - 6

By the benevolence of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, may all beings be well and happy. Today we take up for discussion *surāmerayamajjapamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī*, the last item of the *pañca-sīla*. This handles undoubtedly one of the most menacing social evils in the world today, namely the proneness of humans to drugs and alcohol. As the old saying **women, wine and song** goes, alcohol seems to have a misleading social attractiveness to all, to men, women and children. No party or social gathering, not even grandma's funeral, without drinks, seems to be the order of the day. Today, drugs too have caught up to that level of prestige.

Enough has been said everywhere about the evils of these. But something is overbalancing. It may be economic policies of governments, cultural trimmings of communities, mental degeneracy of the down trodden and the impoverished

groups, they all contribute towards the increasing popularity of alcohol in society. Or willingly or unwillingly it becomes the booster of violent crimes in the land, for those who want to commit or wish to have them committed. But over all, what was once deemed a social requirement, namely drinking, has today turned out to be a social menace. Counteracting temperance movements, started and undertaken with a great deal of fanfare decades ago, appear to have served no more purpose than fiddling besides a deaf elephant, as they say in Sinhala - *bihiri aliyāṭa veṇa gānavā vageyi*.

Talking of the evils of drinking, the Buddha's basic question is whether a person should drink or take in something, having taken which he or she loses the power of judgement: *Kim nu kho bhikkhave taṃ pātabbaṃ yaṃ pivivā visaññī assa*. [Remember the verb *pibati* in Pali from the root *-I pā* to drink is used for intake of both liquids and smoke, as in Sinhala *duṃ pānaya duṃ beema*.]. This is the Buddha's main logic about the intake of alcohol and drugs. Unimpaired judgement is man's greatest asset in life. It is the capacity to judge that makes man different from animals. We know what humans do, both men and women, when they have taken one too many, even one for the road.

A limited amount of alcohol is sometimes believed to be a relaxant. But it is not even in the power of medical men to decide what this amount is. Therefore most of them believe it is best left alone. This loss of judgement often leads to lack of decency and decorum in social behaviour. The resulting impropriety of behaviour can often lead to disasters of diverse sorts. This loss of one's sense of shame in drunkenness or *kopīna-niddaṃsanī* is one of six evils of drinking listed in the Sigāla Sutta of the Buddhists.

A beautiful sculptured panel of five life-size figures, titled **Family Drinking Scene** from Hadda in Afghanistan, which I had the good fortune to study at the Muse Guimet in Paris, tells us an equally beautiful story. It dates back to the second century of the Christian era. It is a piece of Buddhist sculpture, done in Greek Gandharan style. At the moment it is in the Muse Guimet in Paris and two

other pieces on the same theme are in Alahabad. Having had the inspiration and the information for their work of art of national importance, these Afghanistan Buddhists portray the mother and the father in the family group as shamelessly naked in their drunkenness. They do not know that their skirts and trousers have dropped ten to fifteen inches, well below their belt line. This is the precise portrayal in the Commentary on the Sigāla Sutta. What lovely admirers of Buddhism these Afghanistan persons would have been more than eighteen centuries ago. Please see Sumangalavilāsinī III. p. 945 for fuller details of what alcohol can do to men and women in their unbridled search for pleasure.

The other two sculptures in Alahabad show equally vulgar lewd behaviour under the influence of alcohol. What a remarkable respect these ancient civilizations seem to show to a religious message of worth to mankind? One cannot fail here to note Buddhism's lead in moral reform over a period of more than two and a half millennia.

On the question of drugs and alcohol, Buddhism has given further advice pertaining to other spheres in life too. It highlights hazards of drinking in many ways: physiological, social and economic. They range from economic drain here and now [*sandiṭṭhikā dhanañjāni*] to drunken brawls [*kalaha-ppavaḍḍhanī*], proneness to disease [*rogānaṃ āyatanaṃ*], loss of reputation [*akitti-sañjananī*] and decline of brain functioning [*paññāya dubbalīkaraṇī*].

It is now for the Buddhists, as well as non-Buddhists, to view this position about alcohol in the life of humans in this country. As far as Buddhism sees it, sex as man or woman and age as young or old is not going to make any difference in one's attitude towards this issue. Perhaps it may be that only a few can develop such sharpness of judgement to assess its vices and virtues. We shall be very glad to leave it to the judgement of the serious liberation seekers, seeking for themselves or for others. We seriously leave alone the pursuants of pleasure and profit.

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**May all beings be well and happy. May there be peace on earth and goodwill
among men.**

